DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 387 579 UD 030 645

TITLE	Building a Community of Learners.
INSTITUTION	North Central Regional Educational Lab., Oak Brook, IL.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	95
CONTRACT	RR91002007
NOTE	24p.; Frequency of publication not specified.
AVAILABLE FROM	North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1900 Spring Road, Suite 300, Oak Brook, IL 60521-1480.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	New Leaders for Urban Schools; v1 n1 Fall 1995
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; Administrator Role; *Community Development; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Instructional Leadership; Parent Role; *School Restructuring; School Size; Socioeconomic Status; Teacher Role; *Urban Schools; Urban Youth
IDENTIFIERS	*Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

The theme of this inaugural serial issue is "Building a Community of Learners." The serial has been designed to address school restructuring and reform and the roles of teachers, administrators, and parents. The first essay, "Constructing Communities of Cooperation" by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood examines structural change in schools and what is meant by a communally organized school. In addition to certain restructuring reforms, school size is found to be critical to student achievement gains and an equitable distribution of these gains across socioeconomic status. "City Park Secondary School: Community, Collaboration, Commitment," drawn from "Teacher Engagement and Real Reform in Urban Schools" by Karen Seashore Louis (1994), describes a school in the process of restructuring. "The Stories of Two Communally Restructuring Schools" by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood considers two additional urban schools working toward restructuring for a sense of community. A final section, "Becoming a Community of Learners: Emerging Leadership Practices," presents questions to help practitioners reflect on leadership and the growth of school community. These questions reflect the commonalities in the experience of the three featured schools. A nine-item selected bibliography is included. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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ED 387 579

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

NEW LEADERS FOR URBAN SCHOOLS

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1 FALL 1995

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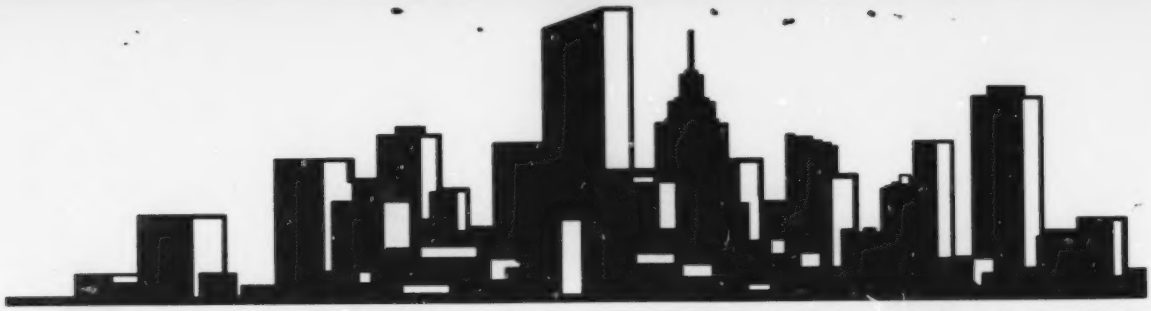

NEW LEADERS for URBAN SCHOOLS

Building a Community of Learners

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With this issue, "Building a Community of Learners," we introduce a new publication from NCREL's Urban Education program: NEW LEADERS FOR URBAN SCHOOLS. This publication has been designed to extend the knowledge base of practitioners; address problems inherent in restructuring and reform; discuss and illuminate new leadership roles for teachers, administrators, other school staff, and parents; and encourage ongoing reflection and practical solutions.

Why is it important to think of schools as communities of learners when we concentrate on building teacher engagement and student achievement? What types of leadership facilitate a communally organized school, and how does a communal school differ from a bureaucratically organized school? What types of structural changes in schools hold the most promise, and how might they be achieved?

In our opening essay, we examine these questions, drawing from new research on this topic. To illustrate the key points of the essay, we introduce real-life stories of those schools. and the voices of teachers and principals who actively are engaged in the daily struggle to improve student learning along with refining their own roles as active learners and willing, collegial partners in that task.

We look at how the actions of school leaders can empower their staffs, and we discover the payoff for student learning when teacher engagement is increased. And although the stories and struggles of the schools in this issue vary, we learn significant lessons from each as principals and teachers tell us how they work to share decisionmaking and create new curriculum, in what ways they support one another in changing their practice, and how they encourage each other to engage in an ongoing and thoughtful dialogue about practices and issues. Finally, we discover commonalities across these three schools, each with a different vision of student learning, and as we resonate to their struggles, we take heart that schools can become true communities of learners.

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"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."

Mark Van Doren

Constructing Communities of Cooperation

by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

Currently we hear much talk of "community" in schools — a term that, like "restructuring," may mean quite different things to different people. Although the context and meaning of community may vary widely — from creating a sense of shared experiences for principals and teachers to creating a supportive climate for students to encouraging students to give something back to the outside community — educators and researchers see community, in general, as a positive factor that should be encouraged in schools.

Understandably, when viewed in this vague and imprecise manner, some educators, however, may demur; they may view "community" as "soft" — a "warm and fuzzy" concept that is intangible, somehow emotional, and therefore suspect. But when framed specifically in terms of how schools are organized to foster teacher engagement and student achievement, many researchers (Barth, personal communication, November 14, 1994; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee & Smith, 1994; Louis, 1994; Newmann, 1994; Peterson, 1994) view community in schools as a key and particularly encouraging part of the current wave of restructuring.

Community: Implications for School Leaders

What precisely do we mean when we talk about "community" in U.S. schools, and what does it mean when a school is communally and collaboratively organized? Newmann (1994) defines community as "school staff members taking collective responsibility for achieving a shared educational purpose, and collaborating with one another to achieve that purpose" (p. 1).

For school leaders, what are the implications of collective responsibility and collaboration? Do the twin concepts, "community" and "collaboration," mean the school principal no longer exerts strong leadership or holds authority?

Far from it. In fact, new concepts of schools as carefully structured communities of learners actually demand *more* from principals: new skills, different ways of working collaboratively with staff to nudge, coax, negotiate, and facilitate their engagement and investment in their work. In communally organized schools, the role of principals shifts from the traditional one of a CEO issuing edicts to a more subtle — and more difficult — role in which the principal must be able to work productively with diverse teams of staff, parents, students, and other stakeholders (Peterson, 1994).

In this publication, we will examine why and in what ways the overall concept of communally organized schools holds promise for increasing teacher engagement and, hence, boosting student achievement. Second, we will scrutinize what leadership means within a communally organized school. Specifically, how does it change? Third, we will look at the actions taken by engaged teachers in communally organized schools. Fourth, we will present the evidence that suggests that a communally organized school leads to greater teacher engagement and heightened student achievement.

Finally, we will illustrate the changing roles of leaders in communally organized schools through a description of City Park Secondary School — a communally organized, very successful urban school drawn from the research of Karen

Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood, an education writer and analyst, is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Wisconsin — Madison. She is the recipient of several honors, including the American Educational Research Association's Interpretive Scholarship Award, given for outstanding contributions relating research to practice.

Seashore Louis — and tell the stories of The Open Charter School (Los Angeles, California) and Florin High School (Sacramento County, California). While City Park Secondary School (a pseudonym for a large urban high school) is far along the road to high teacher engagement, demanding curricula for all students, and boosted student achievement — and thus can be considered an exemplar of a communally organized school — its staff would undoubtedly consider it a work in progress. The other two schools amply illustrate the successes and ongoing challenges of schools restructuring for community and engagement, and each has a different experience to relate.

Community vs. Bureaucracy

When a school is communally organized, how does it depart from conventional practice? Lee and Smith (1994, pp. 1-2) draw a distinction between schools organized communally and schools organized bureaucratically. They describe bureaucratically organized schools as typically large, headed by a principal who functions as a manager, and comprehensive — offering an array of specialties and courses from which students choose. Lieberman, Falk, and Alexander (1995) concur, maintaining that the principal in such schools is assumed to be the fount of pedagogical knowledge and the repository of power and control.

The negative aspects of bureaucratically organized schools, they contend, include increased stratification of students into high and low tracks; a lack of sustained time spent together on the part of teachers and students; and different and conflicting goals held by people in the school due to its size, complexity, and lack of agreement on a common mission.

In contrast, Lee and Smith describe communally organized schools as typically smaller, where complicated rules and procedures are less necessary, and where staff agree on the "organizational purpose" of the school (p. 2). Teachers' roles shift to collaborative ones, where they frequently work in teams on interdisciplinary curricula, which also serves to break down barriers between content areas. Rather than separating students by interests and abilities, diverse students are grouped together, and that is seen as a school strength, not a disabling and punishing sanction visited upon staff.

Characteristics of Schools With High Teacher Engagement

Louis (1994), in her discussion of teacher engagement in urban schools, carefully defines teacher engagement, pointing out the additional struggles educators in urban schools confront, which include dwindling or severely insufficient resources, highly diverse student populations, and the demands of poverty and violence. Next, she pinpoints characteristics of school culture, school organization, teacher engagement, and school leadership that make successful communally organized schools stand apart.

Teacher engagement, she explains, falls into four types: two are "affective and focus on human relationships within the school," and two others are "instrumental and focus on the goals of teaching and learning" (p. 7). The four types include:

- ✓ Engagement with the school as a social unit
- ✓ Engagement with students as unique whole individuals rather than as 'empty vessels to be filled
- ✓ Engagement with academic achievement
- ✓ Engagement with a body of knowledge (p. 8)

The cultures of the schools where teacher engagement is high, she says, include:

- ✓ A strong sense of being in a school with a mission
- ✓ An emphasis on closeness among staff members, an emphasis on respect and caring for students
- ✓ A demand for active problem-solving among teachers
- ✓ Peer pressure among teachers to work (pp. 14-19)

These school culture characteristics don't just happen, however — they are encouraged by a host of organizational factors that include creating structures to promote teacher decision-making, teacher collaboration, teacher professional development, and curriculum improvement (pp. 19-23).

In schools where these characteristics of school culture and organization are present, the principal's role changes from that of a traditional, top-down leader to a collaborative, knowledgeable, and entrepreneurial partner with staff, parents, and the broader outside community. Louis describes specific actions principals take to promote high teacher and student engagement, including:

- ✓ Buffering teachers from external distractions and demands
- ✓ Attending to daily routines (including an open-door policy when possible, high informal visibility within the

school, interacting informally with students and staff)

- ✓ Delegating and empowering staff as well as forthrightly confronting disengaged teachers
- ✓ Providing leadership on values held communally (pp. 24-26)

Overcoming the "Myths of Leadership"

What facilitates the type of leadership demanded in a collaborative and communal school, the leadership that helps teachers invest and engage in their work with a strong focus on student achievement? Peterson (1994, p. 18) argues that the five "myths of leadership" identified by Bennis and Nanus (1985) must be overcome. The myths include:

- ✓ Leadership is a rare skill
- ✓ Leaders are born, not made
- ✓ Leaders are charismatic
- ✓ Leadership exists only at the top
- ✓ The leader controls, prods, directs, and manipulates

In fact, Peterson argues, the type of leader needed in a communally organized school is one who sees the leadership potential in teachers and parents, who believes that staff development facilitates leadership, and who is able to motivate (not manipulate) others. In communally organized schools, he believes, leaders can be found in every position throughout the school and, in fact, must be in place for the school to succeed. Finally, control is something the collaboratively oriented leader has relinquished in favor of a more egalitarian ideal that believes in others' abilities to problem-solve (p. 19).

Although the principals of City Park, The Open Charter School, and Florin High School differ in their administrative styles, they all demonstrate a collaborative, yet decisive, leadership style that has provided impetus for schoolwide teacher engagement, interdisciplinary curriculum planning, and high commitment to student achievement. In fact, the principals in the three schools we feature probably shunned a top-down leadership style from the outset of their administrative careers.

These principals vary in their personal characteristics and temperaments, but they share a healthy respect for their staffs, the belief that teachers can and should problem-solve, the insistence that teachers be actively engaged in planning curriculum collaboratively (as interdisciplinary and thematic as possible), a commitment to consensus-building in their schools around a common mission and shared goals, and the belief that they should model professional development for staff.

The Roles of Principals and Teachers in Communally Organized Schools

Principals and teachers in communally organized schools share certain characteristics, even though their roles differ. For instance, in the three schools we feature, teachers and principals see themselves as active, hungry learners. They work hard to empower students to move from their familiar roles as passive recipients of information to active participants in the act of learning.

Principals encourage teachers to plan curriculum collaboratively — with input from a variety of sources, including parents and administrators — and where possible, urge staff to participate in worthwhile professional development experiences. In many bureaucratically organized schools, staff development initiatives stop once the teacher returns to the classroom, uncertain or unable to implement the ideas she or he has gleaned. The teacher is not helped by a rigid departmental structure that discour-

...in communally organized schools, leaders can be found in every position throughout the school and, in fact, must be in place for the school to succeed.

ages the sharing of ideas. In communally organized schools, principals frequently participate side by side in the same professional development experiences with their teachers and collaboratively plan implementation of new ideas and concepts when they return to their schools. Staff in communally organized schools are open to ideas from the outside world and try to base their curricular decisions on a solid research base, but do not rely heavily on outside "experts."

As one principal says:

Staff development has to happen from within. We can't rely on gurus from the outside because once those gurus leave, so do their ideas.

Principals work to involve teachers in a collaborative governance structure — a school norm, for instance, makes it important to participate on at least one committee. In communally organized schools, the committees have significant decision-making authority and are not hollow gestures toward involving teachers and parents.

Principals and teachers also share the characteristics of risk-takers and educational entrepreneurs — willing to try something new to see how well it works and willing to be vulnerable enough to ask for help. They possess a high degree of trust in their colleagues; in revealing areas in which they need help, they will not be perceived as weak. They are also willing to take on considerable outreach work with parents and the outside community, viewing it not as an empty effort at public relations, but integral to the school's mission and goals.

Both principals and teachers in our three schools share respect for their students — respect that they find is returned. As one teacher says:

"I don't think educators treat children very honestly very often: . . . when you have an authentic situation in the classroom where you ask them honestly and you intend to listen, you get a whole different kind of reaction. As educators, we have to tap into that and quit the authoritarian separation of 'I know and you don't know.' The more honest questioning we can do the better results we are going to get."

In communally organized and oriented schools, lines of demarcation — between those who are supposedly "finished" as learners and those who are just starting out — are not clearly drawn; rather, *all* are learners and share that status.

Peer pressure in communally organized schools can nudge up the performance of disengaged teachers– or squeeze out those who cannot perform at the school's expectations.

How Teachers' Roles Change

What specific actions do engaged teachers take in communally organized schools that differ from traditional practice? First, teachers relinquish often long-held and comfortable roles as content authorities and begin the often uncomfortable process of questioning the effectiveness of their practice. This is especially difficult in secondary schools due to their history (Urban, 1982) and departmental, content-focused structure.

Engaged teachers also share their successes and problems with their peers, which means they become vulnerable to external scrutiny and feedback — which illustrates a highly professional ethos. Peer pressure in communally organized schools can nudge up the performance of disengaged teachers — or squeeze out those who cannot perform at the school's expectations.

The Evidence: Is Community in Schools Effective?

Do communally organized schools "work"? The results of a study conducted by Lee and Smith (1994) strongly indicate they do. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) in a study undertaken for the

National Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, the authors asked if students learned more in schools organized communally. They then hypothesized that shifts from bureaucratically organized schools to communally organized schools would affect student engagement positively, that achievement gains would be distributed more evenly among students with differing socioeconomic backgrounds, and that students would learn more in smaller schools.

The authors identified traditional, moderate, and restructuring practices for their study. The restructuring practices included the following:

- ✓ Students keep same homeroom throughout high school
- ✓ Emphasis on staff solving school problems
- ✓ Parents volunteer in the school
- ✓ Interdisciplinary teaching teams are present
- ✓ The curriculum includes independent study and interdisciplinary English/social studies
- ✓ Mixed-ability classes in math/science
- ✓ Cooperative learning focus
- ✓ Student evaluation of teachers important
- ✓ Independent study in math/science
- ✓ School-within-a-school
- ✓ Teacher teams have common planning time
- ✓ Flexible time for classes (p. 3)

In their findings, Lee and Smith concluded that student achievement gains in the first two years of high school were "significantly higher" in the restructuring schools, with the achievement gap between lower socioeconomic status and higher socioeconomic status narrowed (pp. 3, 5). They also noted that schools that tried to take on too many activities that the authors defined as "restructuring reforms" — initiatives dramatically different from their current practice — were not as successful. And apart from the restructuring reforms they identified for their study, they found that school size is critical to both student achievement gains and an equitable distribution of those gains across socioeconomic status.

But the authors caution that simply implementing a number of items from their list of restructuring practices does not guarantee that student achievement will rise or that teacher engagement will increase. The change process, they warn, is too complicated for these restructuring practices to serve as a simplistic list or blueprint for schools to follow.

Membership in a communally organized school — a true community of learners — means a considerable investment of self. The principals and teachers in our three schools are neither saints nor martyrs. Rather, they are real human beings often oppressed by the larger-than-life problems they face daily that are outside their control to affect directly, such as homeless students, high mobility, and severe and persistent poverty. An additional challenge — which can be an asset — is how to deal effectively with many different cultures and languages under one school roof. As they tell us, first forming a community of learners and then inhabiting it with advanced problem-solving abilities and thoughtfulness has meant they think differently about their roles as educators and about the students and families that they serve.

Selected bibliography may be found under flap

But the authors caution that simply implementing a number of items from their list of restructuring practices does not guarantee that student achievement will rise or that teacher engagement will increase.

City Park Secondary School: Community, Collaboration, Commitment

The Setting

City Park Secondary School is a small, innovative secondary school located in an impoverished section of a major northeastern city. It sits in the shadow of a public housing project where poverty, crime, drugs, and violence touch community members' lives daily. The school shares a large 1950s-era building with two other small schools. The district allows high school parents and students to choose which school students will attend. Although the immediate neighborhood is largely Hispanic, the school aims for a diverse enrollment and has largely succeeded: Its student body is approximately 45 percent black, 35 percent Hispanic, and 20 percent white. Students show a broad range of academic ability.

The Philosophy

City Park has roots in the progressive education tradition. It subscribes to the following principles: minimization of bureaucracy; a humanistic, open environment characterized by equal respect for staff and students (students do not need passes to go to the bathroom, and students and staff both use their first name); no tracking; a core curriculum planned and developed by teams of teachers; significant team planning time; instructional and learning strategies oriented around "essential questions" and inquiry; parent involvement; and an overall sense of family.

City Park's principal has a philosophy of collaboration that ties teacher engagement to student engagement:

> *You must remove teachers from isolation and make learning exciting. To make learning exciting for students, you must make learning exciting for teachers, because when learning is exciting for both teachers and students, kids can't get lost.*

The Structure

The school enrolls around 600 students in three divisions (7-8, 9-10, and 11-12). These are further divided into houses with about 80 students each. There are no traditional departments. Instead, each division has a Math-Science Team and a Humanities Team, each consisting of about five teachers. Teams meet weekly for two hours to develop and coordinate curriculum, share ideas, and discuss what has and has not worked.

Scheduling is nontraditional, with students and teachers meeting for two-hour blocks. Because of the division structure, students stay with the same teachers for two years. They also have the same advisor throughout their high school years. A daily one-hour advisory period focuses on guidance for academic and personal growth, and reinforces the "family" atmosphere of the school.

The entire school structure of City Park is seen by teachers as designed for empowerment:

> *We are a decision-making school. We work as a whole school, we work. . . within our team and. . . within our classrooms where even kids are allowed to make some decisions about how things are to be done.*

City Park's schedule makes time for a weekly two-hour meeting in which teams develop curricula, teaching strategies, and student assignments. The schedule reflects the value the school places on teachers' engagement with the academic program:

> *In my other school, what I was good at, I stayed good at. What I wasn't good at, I never improved. . . I really could have been in the building all by myself. There were never times when you could get together and discuss issues with other teachers.*

Schoolwide Engagement in Action

City Park's teachers:

- Trust one another:

> *When I came here . . . I had to learn a lot. I got a tremendous amount of help. [The principal] helped me; [another teacher] with 14 years of experience became my best friend here . . . I used to meet him every morning to talk about what we were going to do and how we were going to do it . . . and he would come observe my classes.*

- Care about students:

  If you are teaching the kids, you see where each kid is and what their next step is. You have to perceive all of the differences; . . . you have to handle the resistance so that they may make steps for themselves . . .That is an engaging process.

- Unearth and solve problems:

  The assumption is that the kids are basically trying to do the best that they can, and that might not be so great at a given point in time, and you try to get everybody together and acknowledge that there's a problem. Rather than trying to blame someone, you try to deal with the problem, what are the different factors, and what can we do to change the situation. And that's the way problems are dealt with, even academically.

- Collaborate with demanding colleagues to stimulate high-quality work
- Participate in schoolwide retreats but ad hoc or semi-planned professional development opportunities are as important as days officially dedicated to staff development
- Develop curricula, instructional units, lesson plans, and instructional designs in teams

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Drawn from *Teacher Engagement and Real Reform in Urban Schools* (1994), by Karen Seashore Louis, published by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, edited by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood.

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"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires."

William Arthur Ward

The Stories of Two Communally Restructuring Schools

by Anne Turnbaugh Lockwood

The Open Charter School, Los Angeles, California

How does the principal — the primary school leader — work to engage teachers collaboratively in their work? How do teachers press one another into a communal, inspiring "best effort"? What structural factors contribute to high teacher engagement and a schoolwide focus on academic achievement? We pursued these questions with staff at two schools: The Open Charter School in Los Angeles, California, and Florin High School in the Elk Grove district of Sacramento County, California.

The Open Charter School enjoys some enviable freedoms from district regulations — but they have been brought about by entrepreneurial, exhaustive work by its principal and teachers. Founded 15 years ago by parents as an alternative to court-ordered, mandatory busing, The Open Charter School is a magnet school that today serves 384 students, K-5, and recently was granted charter status. Its commitment to diversity is seen in its student population: 30 percent Caucasian, 20 percent Hispanic, 20 percent African American, 20 percent Asian, and approximately 2 percent other ethnicities, including Native American. Students apply for admission and are selected by lottery; to ensure diversity of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status, points are given for the location of their neighborhood school, their ethnicity, and the ethnic needs of the district.

One of the first things an observer notices about The Open Charter School is its unusual governance structure: a governing board makes all policy decisions at the school and is comprised of the principal, 6 of the school's 12 teachers who rotate their participation, and elected parent representatives from each demographic area that sends students to the school. The principal, Grace Arnold, also serves on a steering committee, which forms the middle level of governance, along with two teacher representatives and the governing board president and vice-president. Finally, a number of committees are devoted to curriculum, technology, budget, and development — with parent representatives who do not find it unusual to chair a committee.

Arnold reveals a great deal about how she views teachers and the school's academic mission when she discusses her leadership philosophy. "I see myself as the great connector," she says, "connecting staff to educational research, to parents, to the business community, to the community at large, to the state legislature." Her entrepreneurial style is a must for The Open Charter School to stay afloat, since it is partially funded by the district and also actively fundraises and competes for private and federal grants to support its programs.

Clearly, Arnold and The Open Charter School's staff enjoy a collaborative relationship, with teachers taking on leadership roles throughout the school — and status issues either blurred or nonexistent.

To what extent is teacher participation on committees welcomed, and not regarded as yet another obligation in a busy teaching day? Arnold says, "Teachers choose the committees in which they want to participate. Having been a principal in other schools, I know that usually when you have committees no one wants to participate—it is perfunctory. Either the committee never meets, or nothing ever happens."

She adds emphatically: "But not here."

Committees respond to the school's needs and are not static, Arnold reports. To illustrate what she terms "the birth of a committee," she points to current staff and parent discussion about how best to educate those students identified as gifted and talented — discussion that she believes should be funneled into a committee to study the topic. "I will set a date for the first meeting of a committee on education for the gifted, and we will appoint a chairperson on the spot from the people who come," she explains. "All committees are always open to anybody — and people come."

Another integral part of the school's structure can be seen in staff commitment to cross-age, team-taught grouping, according to Delores Patton, a third/fourth grade teacher. "We teach in clusters of two teachers and 64 children, with an overlap of K/1, 2/3, 3/4, 4/5, and 4/5/6," she explains. Just as teachers decide the committees in which they want to participate, they select their team partners on a voluntary basis.

Authentic Curricula and Student Engagement

The focus of The Open Charter School is emphatically on student learning — with teacher learning paramount as well. The clusters are interdisciplinary and constructed in a way that demands a great deal from teachers as well as students. The innovative unit on cities that Patton and her team partner, Denise Cole, teach for grades three and four is an example of the imagination and careful planning that teachers bring to their classrooms.

The yearlong unit is based on students' "wish" for a different city where they would like to live in the future. "We walk the neighborhood, look at structures, and then look at a land model we have in the classroom, which is a 14 by 8 foot styrofoam model," Patton says. "Each child gets a piece of the model, like a piece of a puzzle, which fits into a neighborhood area."

Students are divided into teams for each neighborhood, and collaboratively they design what they would like to have in their neighborhood area, which challenges their mathematical skills. "We do a lot with scale, because they have to figure out that half an inch equals six feet," Patton explains.

Students also must provide the city services that would be essential to keep a city functioning. Within their neighborhood teams they make a map of what they want to plan and they use items that they find to build the city, design it, paint it, and imagine what it would be like to live in it."

Each neighborhood team is divided into eight different commissions, with positions on each commission for every child. Each commission does an in-depth study of an aspect of a city, such as transportation, history, arts, or environment — and the rigors of commission work demand that students become "expert" in their topic, she says, which requires a substantial amount of reading. "They design the transportation for the city," Patton says, "and the environmental commission plans parks and recreational facilities for the city. The work the teams and commissions do is like putting together a quilt."

Obviously, Patton believes the benefits of this unit are substantial. "Learning this way empowers kids, because they are designing something that is similar to something they will live in when they are adults. They know instantly it is really an authentic curriculum."

Does she experience any difficulties with such a complicated and lengthy unit — which could become unwieldy or impractical? "No," she responds. "One of the great things about the city project is that it provides equal access for all children to learn. It doesn't matter if you can read or whether you are super in math — everyone in the cluster lives in a city."

She tells a poignant story to illustrate her point. "I have one little girl who is struggling with reading," she continues, "and she lived in an inner-city neighborhood that wasn't well-tended. We were talking about streets and repairing streets, and she looked up and said, 'They don't repair my street very often; there are big holes in my street.'"

Patton reports that a surprisingly sophisticated political discussion of inequity evolved spontaneously among the children, following the child's comment, which to her epitomizes the value of the project, just one of many innovative curriculum projects at The Open Charter School. She says, "It doesn't matter whether you count how many seconds it takes a light to change on your corner, whether the trees are dead on your street, or whether you don't have trees at all, there is some issue in your neighborhood that you can address."

She also looks beyond the demands The Open Charter School's curriculum places upon students to an unusual quality that permeates it: honesty. "As educators we have to tap into how smart children are," she says, "and quit the authoritarian separation of 'I know and you don't.'"

Assessment: Strong Commitment to Authenticity

Student achievement at The Open Charter School is measured through statewide standardized tests and district tests, although philosophically the staff leans toward forms of authentic assessment. Arnold says, "We have student portfolios, with children encouraged to evaluate their own work and select samples of work to go into the portfolio. We also have parent-teacher conferences with the student present."

Patton says, "As a teacher and a parent, I believe we have to have some kind of statewide testing to make sure everybody deals with similar standards. In my classroom, my partner and I run a tight ship. We do high-level stuff. We try not to make the environment pressured,

but to set really high standards that reflect what we expect. They do a great deal of writing, a lot of editing, and a lot of polishing of certain pieces."

Both Patton and Arnold are especially enthusiastic about The Open Charter School's three-way assessment conferences, in which the child plays an integral role. "We give the child a student evaluation sheet, and ask her to evaluate how she feels her writing and math is going," Patton says. "We require that they answer the questions on this three-page document in complete sentences."

That exercise alone is a form of assessment, she says. "If a child can't write complete sentences, I will help her. But I am still going to make her do it." If the child's self-evaluation is inflated, teachers point that out at the conference, although, Patton reports, "Usually kids are harder on themselves than others are."

Arnold agrees. "We establish a collaborative with the child. The child can't say, 'The teacher is mean. The teacher doesn't like me,' and then the parent comes to school and complains about the teacher. This way everything is totally straightforward."

Many-Faceted Collaboration

To Arnold, the collaborative structure of The Open Charter School is the skeleton upon which the best learning experience can be constructed. "The strength of the school is its collaborative tone and everyone being together. Our mission is to focus on children's learning, and whatever we think is straightforward, it is out there."

Arnold points out that it is unrealistic, even unnatural to expect perfect agreement among staff at all times. To her, one sign that the school's collaborative culture is alive and well is its above-board tone and style, adhered to by all staff.

She says candidly, "We do have disagreements and arguments about what should be done, but everything is above board. We discuss things outright because ultimately what is best for the child is in everybody's heart. Even the parents, ultimately, will defer to the teacher."

Self-Evaluation and Monitoring

Part of the school's culture stresses ongoing self-evaluation for teachers, who appear to approach their work as a vocation, not an occupation. For example, there is no possibility Patton or her peers can be bored, she says, because their class preparation is simply too demanding and rigorous.

Yet neither she nor other teachers see this as onerous. Interestingly, unlike many teachers in bureaucratically organized schools who believe educational research is too "ivory tower" and divorced from everyday reality, Patton wishes she had more time to read research to inform and stimulate her practice.

Obviously, this approach to teaching and interacting with children can become all-consuming — a concept Patton applauds. "Why shouldn't it be?" she asks rhetorically. "It makes sense to me that you ought to teach what you love and that you ought to learn what you teach."

Arnold is eager to move to peer evaluations for teachers, saying, "It would fit in perfectly because the teachers are already divided into teams. All they have to do is give each other feedback, and I am encouraging them to ask one another to observe them and give them feedback on something."

But the fervor of The Open Charter School means that it is not a workplace for all teachers — nor will all teachers be happy or fit in easily. Both Patton and Arnold mention the rigorous demands staff place upon one another — an aspect of the school as a workplace that has been maintained partly through the school's ability to hire the staff they want. Patton says, "We have gotten savvy about the hiring process. We have been burned a couple of times, and we are careful."

What do staff look for in prospective teachers? "Commitment," Patton replies immediately, "understanding of curriculum, and love of kids. We might ask: Tell us about the projects you do in your school. If they have a weeklong assignment, we see that as one level of commitment. If they do something for a year, that is another level of commitment. If they are doing something on the governing board and arranging speakers to come into the school, that is what we are looking for."

Implementing Professional Development

Staff development does not stop with teachers attending workshops, because there is a built-in mechanism to ensure that teachers will apply and refine what they learn when they return to their classrooms. Arnold says, "Teachers wanted to refine the instruction in math and science, and this year we sent six teachers — one per cluster — plus myself to a weeklong science institute sponsored by the University of Southern California."

The institute did not end with principal and teacher participation, however, because the six participating teachers and Arnold planned how to involve the remaining teachers in a

critical scrutiny of the science program. "We started the process of using the science framework to identify important ideas and concepts in science, deciding where we will emphasize them during the six years that children are here in school."

The next step will be a weekly, hourlong "Teachers' Dialogue" for six teachers, alternating weekly, so that all twelve teachers will have an opportunity to meet and work on the science concepts alternating weeks.

"We will use the dialogue approach to look at the materials, to see how we can expand what we are doing now. The teachers here," Arnold says with pride, "really have a lot of expertise. If they draw from one another and use the resources here at the school, they can polish their teaching. They don't need people from the outside telling them what to do. We find that meaningful staff development is a dialogue, an ongoing collaboration between the principal, the teachers, and outside resources."

Although their work is grueling, staff look to the future with optimism. Arnold says, "Here as a principal I have a wonderful environment. I get to learn a lot. Personally, I find it stimulating because I deal with very strong parents and deal with different situations. The most interesting question for me is: What can we create that will be the best in public schooling for children?"

Not surprisingly, Patton has a similar vision. "We are looking toward the future," she says passionately, "and we want to be on the cutting edge both in curriculum and in its application to technology as well. We are seeking to better ourselves and offer what we know to other people."

"I am still learning."

Michelangelo

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Florin High School, Elk Grove District, Sacramento, California

What challenges does a high school -- traditionally the last bastion of conventional practice — face when committed to restructuring for a communal, collaborative structure? How does it deal with an ambitious, ever-shifting program and an extremely diverse student population? How does the principal's leadership style foster teacher engagement and collaboration so that barriers between content areas are diminished? Built in 1989, Florin High School opened with 1,100 students ninth and tenth grades) and has added a grade each year. Experiencing rapid growth, Florin presently enrolls approximately 2,500 students, has an AFDC count of approximately 36 percent, and is markedly diverse: 36 percent White, 17 percent African American, 12 percent Hispanic, 25 percent Southeast Asian, 1 percent Native American, and 8-9 percent Filipino/Pacific Islander. Twenty-nine different languages are spoken daily at the school.

In some ways staff at Florin High School were presented with an enviable challenge in the late 1980s: the opportunity to plan a new high school, one committed to ongoing restructuring and a collaborative work environment within which an emphasis on student learning would be paramount. Chosen to participate in an ASCD-sponsored initiative to create the school of the future, their views were broadened by visits to schools nationwide where they gleaned ideas.

And Florin's staff was receptive to what they witnessed. Today, they use words like "visionary" and "cutting edge" when they talk about the agenda set for the school. Teachers clearly have thought carefully about the meaning of "restructuring," a term frequently used somewhat loosely in the educational community. As Sue Verne, Florin's restructuring coordinator and a social studies teacher, explains, "Restructuring means that a school is a demonstration school, a visionary school, a school on the cutting edge of making changes, a school that doesn't have all the answers, a school that shows constant change."

Although Florin's creation was not a top-down initiative, the importance of the principal as leader was underscored when its first principal, William Huyitt, was appointed a year and a half before the school's physical existence. The current principal, Odie Douglas, at that time vice-principal, was an integral part of the initial planning, and was promoted into his current position in 1992, thus avoiding a leadership vacuum and possible loss of continuity.

Collaboration for Curriculum and Governance

Douglas remembers the initial planning and the general beliefs to which staff shared a commitment. "We wanted to be able to meet the needs of every student," he recollects æ and that philosophy meant a demanding environment for both students and staff. Administrators and teachers agreed they wanted to offer a challenging college preparatory curriculum to all students in a setting of heterogeneous grouping — and they wanted to depart from traditional subject-focused instruction to have a focus on interdisciplinary education. "We wanted this focus primarily in English and social studies," Douglas explains, "but also in other academic subjects as well."

To ensure that teachers didn't succumb to content-focused, rigidly separated instruction — all too common in high schools — Florin's first principal, Bill Huyitt, and Douglas worked with staff to plan a collaborative structure both for curriculum and governance. Rather than departments, the school is grouped in broad divisions to allow as much interdisciplinary work as possible and to facilitate communication across content areas.

The five divisions consist of math, science, and technology; cultures and literature; visual and performing arts; health and P.E.; and instructional support, which consists of counseling and special education. These divisions, through their structure, demand that teachers see their content areas within a larger context. For instance, math teachers do not interact at a departmental level solely with other math teachers; instead, they engage in dialogue with science and technology teachers in efforts to integrate all of their classroom work.

"Restructuring means that a school is a demonstration school, a visionary school, a school on the cutting edge of making changes, a school that doesn't have all the answers, a school that shows constant change."

Different committees hold responsibility for the school's decision-making, including curriculum and instruction, monitoring and evaluation, school environment, and planning and instruction. Douglas explains that the planning and instruction committee serves as the overseer committee, monitoring the school's vision and all issues that affect the school's overall functioning. All other committees feed into the planning and instruction committee and are represented on it.

This carefully crafted structure encourages each division to seek representation on each committee, he explains. Although committee participation is not mandatory, currently 60 to 70 percent of the teaching staff serve on one committee or more.

Parents also serve on each committee in a deliberate effort to empower them and expand their input into the decision-making processes of the school, which helps to decrease barriers that might exist between school staff and low-income parents or parents of color. Students are represented as well.

Consensus must be reached on each and every decision, a time-consuming and delicate process aided by Douglas's nontraditional view of himself as a leader and his collaborative view of leadership. The essence of the consensus-building process, he says, means that staff are asked continuously if they can live with decisions that they make.

"We use voting to give an indication of the majority opinion," he says, "but if the group as a whole cannot live with the majority decision, we simply have to continue to work with the decision until they can live with it."

What if a stalemate is reached? Clearly, Douglas isn't easily frustrated. "We continue to work through it," he says, "and it can be time-consuming. To aid the process, we issue whatever research we have ahead of time so that committee members can examine it and present issues that are both objective and based upon some research base."

As an example, Douglas explains how a schedule change became one of those decisions staff could not live with, and how a nontraditional view of leadership aided the consensus-reaching process. "We added 20 minutes to Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday so that staff could gather for an hour every Wednesday five minutes before the start of school. Teachers were getting out of school on that day an hour and five minutes early — but we had a problem with student security because the buses were not coming until the regular time."

The time was intended originally as collaborative planning time for teachers and extracurricular activity time for students, but as Douglas says pragmatically, "When you have 2,500 students, they are not all going to be involved in something. It had to change, but when we took a vote, 53 were in favor of changing it and 30 were not."

"I deliberately tried not to be the focus," he says, "and another staff member asked the question that was the bottom line: 'Who is willing to supervise the afternoon activities?' There were no volunteers, so we moved on to discuss the morning activity time versus the afternoon activity time. Teachers were willing to change the morning schedule; the buses will bring the kids later so we will not have supervision problems."

An Emphasis on Community

Florin does not see itself as an educative island, separate from the community that it serves — a concept especially critical for schools actively restructuring to ensure that teachers and students will be engaged in their work. Just as parent representation on school-wide decision-making committees helps break down barriers and improves communication between families and the school, so does active involvement in school life from the greater community.

An example of the school's partnership with the community is a Partners' Breakfast recently hosted by the school, attended by over 50 of the school's partners, described by Verne as a variety of representatives from businesses and academe. The breakfast was one of Florin's ongoing events to recognize and thank the community for its initiatives undertaken on behalf of the school.

"We might partner with a local donut shop that is willing to support our athletic Booster club," Verne says, "or the dean of engineering at Sacramento State. Other partners might be attorneys who helped with our mock trial competition; the California Department of Transportation, which adopted the school; or All-State Insurance Agency, which has mentored some of our students."

Clearly, this kind of broad-based community support requires entrepreneurial actions from school staff, coupled with a willingness to convince the outside community that the school is a worthy investment. Although some school-business-academe partnerships exist in name only, Florin's partners each have a different — and integral — role that Verne sees as a foundation for the ambitious curriculum and assessment plans that are the essence of Florin's mission.

Interdisciplinary Instruction

Although Douglas describes Florin's schedule as "primarily traditional — hour classes for the most part" — English and social studies classes are teamed in an unusual way. Teachers plan their instruction together in a daily hour prep period — although interdisciplinary preparation time is voluntary, not mandated. The classes are not team-taught, but students experience continuity in thematic instruction between the English and social studies classes they take.

There is some latitude, Douglas says. "If an English teacher and a social studies teacher want to hold their students for a couple of hours, they could do that, if they agree with their partner that it is necessary, because the classes have the same students."

Although the interdisciplinary, thematic approach to instruction was part of Florin's original mission, it has met with mixed success, Douglas says frankly. On the one hand, he is pleased that teachers appear to be succeeding in efforts to transcend traditional roles as deliverers of information to what he calls "facilitators who are learning themselves." It is exciting, he says, to see teachers encouraging students to demonstrate different learning styles and avenues of problem-solving. "It is wonderful to go into a classroom during a final exam," he adds, "and see performance-based activities, students giving presentations, students explaining information both in writing and orally."

Still, he sees considerable room for improvement. Overall, student achievement as measured on district standardized tests and SATs, is disappointing to staff at Florin, with standardized test scores around the 50th percentile in some areas and below that in others.

"Many teachers feel that the tests don't address what we are doing," he says. As a result, monitoring student progress is interpreted broadly as a combination of standardized test scores; the grade distribution of students at a "C" or above ("admittedly subjective by teacher," Douglas quickly notes); the number of students enrolled in courses that meet the sequence of courses necessary to be eligible for admission in the University of California system; and new, performance-based assessments developed by staff.

Much remains to be done, Douglas adds. "We are trying to standardize our authentic assessment practices so we can demonstrate that our students are learning, but at the same time we realize that our students need to show their ability on standardized tests."

Commitment to Diversity

Because of the almost overwhelming diversity of Florin's students, its curriculum attempts to break down cultural, ethnic, and racial barriers through a focus on beliefs all students and teachers share. In Verne's 12th grade government class, for example, she brings government close to home, leading class discussions about the changing demographics, especially in California, and student demographics at Florin.

"Doing that makes them more aware of the changes in California and how they will take part in them," Verne said. "We then move into discussions about who at Florin will go to college."

This concrete representation of the stratification of power has a powerful impact on students, notes Verne, who adds: "At that point, you can hear a pin drop in the class."

As the next step, she works to empower students to envision a future for themselves. "When students see these things," she says, "they're more apt to want to stay in the system, especially when you show them a breakdown of state and local government, including who is elected and who is in power. You tell them: 'You can make a difference.' For the immediate future, that means staying in school and graduating."

Her biggest fear — one shared by other staff at Florin — is that students will leave school prematurely. "I spend a lot of time on local government issues, because that is where they can get involved at the grass roots level. They are required to spend from two to five hours outside the school seeing government in action, interviewing somebody, or shadowing somebody at the state or local level."

This is a big assignment, Verne says, for students who may never have seen the state capitol. She is equally committed to discussions that focus on responsibility. "I work on their civic virtue by making deals with them to work in the tutoring center after

"When kids see the collegiality that teachers have with each other, it spins off to them. As we become consensus builders in our governance process, it transfers to the classroom. Just being the professional community that we are — in which we see ourselves as professional teachers — imparts an expectation for achievement to students."

school, or help me run the recycling effort at school. When I bring in newspapers, we talk about who is making the decisions, what the conflicts are, what the responsibilities are."

Students have an opportunity to exercise their responsibilities as citizens through pairing with immigrant, non-English speaking students in a Cooperative House designed for students who have mastered English well enough to be mainstreamed into the regular curriculum after their original brief placement in a Newcomers' House.

"Native English-speaking students volunteer for the Cooperative House," Verne explains, "which is one period a day, where kids get the same curriculum as they would elsewhere in the school. Teachers tell me the kids are doing marvelously well."

Douglas summarizes the diversity of Florin's students as one of the school's biggest challenges — and also its greatest strength. "The diversity of ability, languages, cultures, ethnicities are assets, as well as challenges, that make it doubly important that we work collaboratively," he says.

Are there sanctions for poor teacher performance or a lack of willingness to work collegially? "In our evaluations," Douglas says, "if we think a teacher is falling short, we discuss that with the teacher, hopefully in a way that will help the teacher see areas of concern, whether they are in curriculum development, instructional strategies, or student performance. Next, together we come up with a plan of action for improvement of that area."

He adds, "If a teacher is not able to be reflective, and feels that he or she is doing a wonderful job — which you observe to be a disaster — than we have to look for an intervention that is more direct and prescriptive. I don't like to do that, because when I do it I am taking ownership of the situation and pushing that teacher where he or she may not see he or she needs to go."

Teachers and Students

Douglas sees himself as an ongoing learner, almost frenetically working to stay ahead of the leadership challenges that face him at Florin. "Whenever I visit a class on an informal basis, or chat with kids, I ask: 'How can I make this school better?' My assessment of this school is ongoing; it is continuous."

He also sees himself as a role model in professional development for his staff. Douglas is finishing his doctoral work in curriculum and instruction at the University of San Francisco, with a dissertation that focuses on predictors of academic achievement for high-performing African American male high school students.

"I am studying the ones who are doing well so that their successes can be replicated," he says. "There is so much information on the ones who aren't making it, and so little on those who succeed."

Verne also sees herself as learning continuously, almost to the point of exhaustion, but she believes the level of effort is worth it. "When kids see the collegiality that teachers have with each other, it spins off to them," she says. "As we become consensus builders in our governance process, it transfers to the classroom. Just being the professional community that we are — in which we see ourselves as professional teachers — imparts an expectation for achievement to students."

Through the stories of these three restructuring, communally organized schools, we see different accomplishments, with City Park Secondary School almost as an exemplar that has achieved the ideal of collaboration and teacher engagement, with a strong focus on academic achievement for students. The Open Charter School and Florin High School are "works in progress" — enjoying many substantive achievements, strong leaders with commitment to empowering staff and raising student achievement through a variety of creative curricula — yet struggling with the ongoing process of change.

How does your own school mesh with the practices presented in the preceding vignettes? In what ways does your own leadership style encourage and facilitate teacher engagement? We encourage you to consider this, and use the following self-reflection tool to evaluate your own leadership style.

As leaders, we play a crucial role in selecting the melody, setting the tempo, establishing the key, and inviting the players. But that is all we can do. The music comes from something we cannot direct, from a unified whole created among the players — a relational holism that transcends separateness. In the end, when it works, we sit back, amazed and grateful.

Margaret J. Wheatley, from *Leadership and the New Science* (1992)

BECOMING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS: EMERGING LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

The following questions will help you to reflect on your leadership and suggest ways to support the emergence and growth of community in your school.

Ways of Leading and Managing	*always*	*frequently*	*sometimes*	*never*
Have we worked together to articulate a shared purpose and educational vision?	○	○	○	○
Do we take collective responsibility for school practices and outcomes?	○	○	○	○
Do leaders in our school emphasize power through people than power over people?	○	○	○	○
Is authority in our school based more on competence and professional knowledge, rather than position and rules?	○	○	○	○
Is leadership in our school characterized more by an image of "an ensemble playing as one" than by an image of the "captain heading the cavalry"?	○	○	○	○
Do leaders in our school facilitate, guide, and coach others to work toward commonly held goals?	○	○	○	○
Do leaders communicate their values and mission in the things they do, how they spend their time, and what they consider important?	○	○	○	○

Approaches to Problem Solving and Decisionmaking	*always*	*frequently*	*sometimes*	*never*
Are discussion and inquiry common and accepted practices in our school?	○	○	○	○
Do we share information and make decisions together?	○	○	○	○
Do we solve problems collaboratively?	○	○	○	○
Are we open to multiple approaches and solutions rather than reliance on single answers and past practices?	○	○	○	○
Is decisionmaking consensual and inclusive as opposed to top-down and nonparticipatory?	○	○	○	○
Concerning Learning				
Is classroom learning authentic and reflective of issues that are important to our students?	○	○	○	○
Do we engage students as active learners and co-constructers of knowledge?	○	○	○	○
Do we provide opportunities for students to direct and be responsible for their own learning?	○	○	○	○
Does learning develop thinking skills for all children rather than emphasize rote acquisition of basic skills?	○	○	○	○

	always	frequently	sometimes	never
Do classroom practices provide opportunities to apply and use knowledge in a variety of contexts?	○	○	○	○
Do we use cooperative learning groups rather than relying solely on independent work and competition?	○	○	○	○
Are some learning experiences interdisciplinary?	○	○	○	○
Do learning experiences in our school incorporate resources outside of the classroom?	○	○	○	○
Structural Conditions				
Are roles in our school flexible and interdependent rather than rigid and hierarchical?	○	○	○	○
Do teachers have considerable autonomy and discretion to plan curriculum and organize instruction within an overall framework?	○	○	○	○
Do we use teams to plan and implement school improvement?	○	○	○	○
Are there opportunities for dialogue and planning across teams, grades, and subjects?	○	○	○	○
Is communication in our school open and fluid as opposed to regulated by traditional chains of command?	○	○	○	○
Relating to the Community				
Do we encourage widescale participation of stakeholders — parents, community members, and students?	○	○	○	○
Do we empower parents and community members to participate in decisions about our school?	○	○	○	○
Do we forge partnerships with community organizations, agencies, and businesses to address the needs of children and families?	○	○	○	○
Are we linking a variety of health and human services to our school?	○	○	○	○

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This publication is based on work sponsored wholly or in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), Department of Education, under Contract Number RP91002007. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of OERI, the Department of Education, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

Graphic Designer: Rhonda Dix

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